

Officer Professional Development

Introduction

Officer professional development is essential to support the Air Force mission and to provide for your professional growth as an officer. The officer who is most effective at carrying out the mission is one who's professionally prepared to assume the responsibilities that go with a particular grade. Professional development of officers is not new in the Air Force. It occurs at every echelon and activity. Ideally, the individual's aspirations and long-term professional development are most likely to be realized when they are in harmony with long-term Air Force requirements.

Study Assignment

Read the information section of this lesson.

Lesson Objective: Know how an officer manages professional development.

Samples of Behavior:

1. Know the objective of the Officer Professional Development (OPD) Program.
2. List the three elements of OPD.
3. Know the objective of each level of Professional Military Education.
4. Know the criteria boards use to select officers for promotion.
5. Describe the items contained in the officer selection folder.

Information

Objective of Officer Professional Development

Professional development includes those actions and experiences that enhance an officer's ability to perform his or her job and thereby contribute to the mission of the Air Force as the level of responsibility increases. It begins with concentration on primary job expertise, broadens through the career, at different rates for different officers, and culminates in a generalist with both depth and breadth of experience. This growth pattern is produced by a well-balanced combination of career area professional expertise, leadership, and management skills. The relative emphasis on these areas will vary since officer roles in support of the mission also vary with both grade and level of responsibility.

The Air Force needs career-oriented officers concerned with their own growth. Therefore, the objective of a professional development program is to emphasize individual duty performance and motivate officers to develop skills that continue to contribute to the Air Force and the defense establishment as job responsibility increases. To accomplish this objective, the Air Force offers its officers numerous means and methods to enhance their professional credentials.

An officer's professional development involves three basic elements: assignments that provide depth and breadth, training and education that support a specific career path, and counseling that provides feedback on performance, training and future assignments. Commander and key supervisor involvement and interaction with the officer is the cornerstone of an officer's professional development. The Air Force provides officers numerous means and methods to enhance their professional credentials.

Role of Professional Military Education (PME) and Advanced Academic Degrees (AAD)

Professional military education (PME) and academic education should parallel and support the requirements of appropriate jobs. PME should build upon a solid foundation of officership laid during precommissioning. The uniqueness of the profession and the particular values and culture of the military officer corps are the bedrock on which all future professional development is based.

Aerospace Basic Course (ABC) is the first level of PME instruction for commissioned officers. Second Lieutenants within one year of commissioning are eligible and are selected to attend ABC by the Air Force Personnel Center. The focus of ABC is to inspire new officers to comprehend their roles as Airmen who understand and live by USAF core values, articulate and demonstrate USAF core competencies, and who dedicate themselves as warriors in the world's most respected Aerospace Force.

The focus for company grade officers should be on developing the skills needed to enhance their career specific competence to include officer leadership. Therefore, leadership and communication skills are paramount and are a primary focus of the Squadron Officer School (SOS), the Air Force's company grade PME. SOS also provides Air Force captains the leadership tools they need to build military teams and lays foundation for critical thinking in air and space power through education on air power history and doctrine.

While building on earlier instruction, the focus for the field grades and, therefore, of Air Command and Staff College (the Air Force's Intermediate Service School) is to learn to develop, advance and apply air and space power in peace and war. This is done through the use of problem-solving technologies of the theater campaign, which emphasizes the analytical and practical tools officers will need as future military leaders.

Senior officers must understand not only the skills taught in earlier PME, but also how to lead in the strategic environment, to include joint and combined operations, and to employ air and space power in support of national security. This is the role of the highest level of PME, Air War College (the Air Force's Senior Service School).

Completion of professional military education (PME) has long been considered crucial to professional development and greater responsibility. Don't wait to be selected for PME in residence. Start by correspondence or seminar as soon as you're

eligible. Statistics show that there's no difference in how you obtain your PME, just as long as you get it. Remember, it's another key to your future!

In the final analysis, the appropriate role of PME in officer professional development is to expand and refine the skills an officer will need to operate effectively and assume increasingly higher levels of responsibility. Officers must recognize that failure to complete the appropriate level of PME by the time of consideration for the next higher grade will have some impact on promotion potential.

Advanced academic degrees are important to officer professional development to the extent that they enhance the degree holder's job and officer qualifications. A degree which is directly related to the primary utilization area (such as an Engineering degree for a Developmental Engineer, AFSC 62E4) would be appropriate at any level since this degree adds to depth of experience. An advanced degree in management or more general studies would tend to enhance job performance for officers reaching the field grade ranks where breadth development begins to take place.

Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT)

In accordance with its mission of providing defense-focused graduate and continuing education research and consultation to improve Air Force and DoD operational capability, AFIT offers programs at the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels at Wright Patterson AFB, Ohio, and in civilian institutions across the country. AFIT has three programs:

1. AFIT at Wright Patterson AFB. Confers degrees engineering, logistics and acquisition management..
2. AFIT in civilian universities. Confers degrees in almost any subject. (However, the Air Force must have a projected need in the subject area before an officer may attend.)
3. AFIT in civilian industries. Officers are placed in jobs at various industrial concerns in order to gain a better understanding of industrial operations in support of the national defense effort.

Contact the base education office for assistance. You can receive full tuition assistance for all three programs.

Operation Bootstrap

Operation Bootstrap is a more readily available means of obtaining undergraduate and graduate degrees than AFIT, particularly in the nontechnical areas (e.g., Business Administration, Education, etc.) Through Operation Bootstrap, Air Force members may attend colleges or universities of their choice to further their education. Operation Bootstrap provides for permissive temporary duty (terminal or nonterminal TDY) for resident study based on AFI 36-2306. In all cases, permission to study full-time is contingent upon the ability of the organization to release the

individual for the requested period of absence. (The individual is not replaced for the period of full time.)

The student is not eligible for tuition assistance during the permissive TDY. Normal pay and allowances continue. The student's active duty service commitment upon return from the full-time study will be three times the length of study.

Terminal TDY. Terminal TDY is for qualified and eligible personnel who have progressed far enough in their college programs that the remaining course requirements for a baccalaureate or higher degree can be completed by resident study within a period ranging from a Summer Session to a year (30 semester hours or less). One may be authorized temporary duty on permissive orders for this purpose.

Nonterminal TDY. Required courses which are not available to students during normal off-duty study may be completed during short periods (up to 16 weeks) of release from usual military duties. The period of study could be increased up to 19 weeks by combining the TDY with annual leave. The three-for-one active duty commitment also applies.

Airman Education and Commissioning Program (AECF)

The Airman Education and Commissioning Program is a means by which airmen who've served in the Air Force a minimum of 1 year may gain a commission. This program, operated by AFROTC, allows airmen who have more than 30 hours of college credits to apply for a program which would send them back to college for up to 36 months to gain a degree. After graduating from college, these individuals are sent to OTS to receive their commissions. Those airmen who already have their degree and have served on active duty for a year or more are also eligible for this program. The only other limiting factor besides stiff competition for slots, is the applicant must be able to obtain both the degree and commission before their 35th birthday.

Obviously, you as an officer aren't eligible for this program, but you may have subordinates who may be interested in AECF. You can have a lot of influence on these people by encouraging qualified enlisted personnel to use the educational benefits they're entitled to and possibly get commissioned.

Tuition Assistance

Tuition Assistance is available to active duty service members. The program is designed to encourage personnel to pursue voluntary, off duty educational opportunities. Tuition assistance is approved for courses offered by post-secondary institutions accredited by a national or regional accrediting body recognized by the Council on Post-secondary Accreditation and the Department of Education. The Air Force will pay 75 percent (rounded down to the nearest dollar) of the tuition cost at a cap of \$250.00 per semester hour or \$166.00 per quarter hour; the individual pays the remaining 25 percent plus fees and books.

New GI Bill Educational Benefits (MONTGOMERY GI BILL)

The Montgomery GI Bill is the current Veterans Administration Program providing 36 months of educational benefits for individuals initially entering active duty after 30 June 1985. These service members must have a pay reduction of \$1200 (\$100 per month for the first full 12 months of active duty), serve 3 years on active duty or 2 years active duty plus 4 years in the Selected Reserves, a high school diploma or equivalent, and an honorable discharge. Effective 1 Apr 93, post service benefits are \$400 per month for 36 months of full-time study for a maximum of \$14,400. Benefits end 10 years from date of separation of retirement.

Those who received commissions from a U.S. military academy or who completed an ROTC Scholarship Program are not eligible for the Montgomery GI Bill.

The counselors at the base education office can assist you in meeting your educational goals.

Finally, as part of officer professional development, one also needs to consider the integral roles of the Officer Evaluation System (OES), promotion system, and assignment system.

Role of the OES

The OES is an integral part of the Air Force Professional Development program and strongly supports the program's goals and philosophy. The OES has three purposes. The first provides meaningful feedback to officers on performance expectations and advice on how well they improve. The second provides a reliable, long-term, cumulative record of performance and potential based on that performance. The third provides central selection boards with sound information to assist them in selecting the best qualified officers. To accomplish these purposes, the OES focuses on performance. This reflects the fact that how well an officer does his or her job, and qualities the officer brings to the job, are of paramount importance to the Air Force. Performance is most important for successful mission accomplishment. Performance is also important for the immediate development of an officer's skills and abilities, for the long-term development of an officer's leadership ability, and in determining who should be selected for promotion. The OES emphasizes performance in several ways. First, every supervisor is required to provide performance feedback to their officers to help them improve their duty performance. Second, performance reports are based solely on performance and the impact an officer has on the unit's mission. Finally, promotion recommendations are based on performance and potential. The OES is a tool that officers can use in their own professional development and in the development of those officers they supervise. More information is available in AFI 36-2402, Officer Evaluation System, and in AFPAM 36-2404, USAF Officer's Guide to the Officer Evaluation System.

Role of the Promotion System

The objective of the officer promotion system is to select officers for advancement who have clearly demonstrated the potential to serve in more demanding leadership positions in the Air Force hierarchy.

Promotion boards are told that demonstrated leadership abilities and performance of primary duties are of overriding importance far outweighing all other considerations. It is this reason that officers need to concentrate on duty performance in their current grade and not on "square-filling" exercises.

Facts and specifics. Promotion programs are designed to ensure that there are enough officers of the desired quality, in the proper grades, to carry out the mission.

- Promotions occur at spaced intervals to maintain a selective flow of officers through the grades in visible advancement patterns that avoid promotion stagnation.
 - The selection process must ensure that the best qualified officers are promoted to positions of increased authority and responsibility based on past performance and future potential.
- a. Promotion opportunity is the percentage of each year group that will be promoted after competing for promotion to the next grade.
 - The Air Force strives to provide equal promotion opportunity to each year group. The number that can be promoted each year is largely determined by Air Force requirements.
 - b. A specific percentage of the promotion quota may be used to select officers BPZ. Officers selected BPZ must, in the judgment of the selection board, be better qualified and possess greater potential than all nonselects in IPZ and APZ. The maximum BPZ selection quota is 10 percent to lieutenant colonel, and 15 percent to colonel.
 - c. While officers previously considered but not selected IPZ and APZ do not generate a quota, they continue to be considered on a fair and equitable basis, and those considered to be "best qualified" are selected for promotion.
 - d. Promotion phase points represent the number of years and months of active commissioned service a "due course" officer--that is, an officer never promoted early or late--can expect to pin on the next higher grade. Average phase points represent the average of the 12 monthly phase points during the fiscal year.
 - e. Second lieutenants are promoted to first lieutenant on a "fully qualified" basis after serving 2 years in their current grade, while first lieutenants and above must be selected for promotion to the next higher grade by a central selection board

on a "best qualified" basis. Selection board schedules are published as far in advance as practical.

f. What criteria do boards use to select officers for promotion? Those officers who are the strongest performers are selected for promotion based on their demonstrated potential to serve in a higher grade in positions of greater responsibility. Promotion boards evaluate records using the "whole person" concept and are briefed that performance of primary duties and demonstrated leadership abilities are more important than other considerations. Factors included in the whole person assessment are:

- **Job Performance**--as documented in PRFs, OPRs, training reports, and letters of evaluation. The PRF, unlike the other documents, is based on the officer's duty performance throughout his or her career. The PRF sends a strong message from the officer's senior rater to the promotion board based on demonstrated performance in his or her current position and in past jobs or positions.
- **Leadership**--in staff, operations, and command positions.
- **Professional Competence**--expertise as a specialist, supervisor, operator, etc.
- **Breadth and Depth of Experience**--where assigned, and at what level, when, variety of jobs and tasks, etc. What the individual has done, where he or she has been, both in and out of his or her particular specialty is considered. However, the "where," "level," "when," etc., are less important than how well the officer performed wherever he or she was assigned.

Lieutenants and captains should concentrate on depth of experience in their career area. Breadth of experience is more appropriate for field grade officers. Somewhere around the mid-major point, an officer's career may broaden.

A lieutenant colonel looking for promotion to colonel should place more emphasis on broader considerations--that is, breadth of duty experiences that include command, career broadening assignments, PME, advanced education, and headquarters assignments.

- **Job Responsibility**--scope of responsibility, exposure, opportunity to make decisions, resources managed, etc.
- **Academic and Professional Military Education**--appropriate level, relationship to career field, and how it improves duty and performance, etc.
- **Specific Achievements**--awards, decorations, special recognition, such as squadron "top gun," maintenance officer of the quarter, etc.

Selection Boards

a. Selection boards are comprised of highly qualified senior officers representing the broadest practical scope of Air Force activities. In order to provide a balanced perspective with regard to the skills of the Air Force, board members mirror, insofar as practical, the officers eligible for consideration with respect to aeronautical rating, career field, and command of assignment. Boards will also have female and minority members and, if considering Reserve officers, one or more board members will be a Reserve officer.

b. The basic eligibility criteria are established approximately 150 days prior to the convening date of a board. Your current grade and date of rank determine eligibility. In most cases (includes all Line officers) officers who have not served on extended active duty for 6 months before their board convenes are not eligible for consideration.

c. About 60 to 90 days before a board convenes, eligible officers receive officer preselection briefs (OPB) through their servicing Military Personnel Flight (MPF). The OPB contains the same information as the officer selection brief (OSB) that is a part of the selection folder evaluated by board members. Officers are responsible for reviewing their OPB and having any errors or omissions corrected by their servicing MPF.

d. Boards are in session from 1 to 2 weeks, depending on the number of officers to be considered and the number of board members to score records.

e. After the board adjourns, the board report is sent through channels in turn to: Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel; Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force; Chief of Staff of the Air Force; Secretary of the Air Force; Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; and the President for nomination to the Senate.

f. The results of selection boards are released after the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management and Personnel) approves the report. Usually, promotion board results are released 4 to 6 weeks after a board adjourns, with notification of selection made by the local MPF promotions unit through the respective commander.

Remember, you don't meet the board, your records do! Board members are tasked to carefully review each officer selection folder, giving appropriate weight to the "whole person" concept used to evaluate the records and considering such factors as: job performance, leadership, job responsibility, professional competence, specific achievements, and education.

Your selection folder may contain the following items (those preceded by an asterisk are mandatory):

- * Officer Performance Reports (OPRs) and Training Reports (TRs)
- * Officer Selection Brief (OSB)

- * Citations for U.S. Decorations
- * Specialty Board Certification
- * Courts-Martial orders containing or reflecting approved findings of guilt

Letters to the board from eligible officers

Letters pertaining to non-attendance, or ineligibility for Professional Military Education (PME) schools

Letter of Not Qualified for Promotion Action from the commander

Oral 368 Nonjudicial Punishment (AF Form 368)

Nonjudicial Punishment Administration (AF Form 307x Series)

Notice Form 366 of Intent to Vacate or Suspend Nonjudicial Punishment (AF Form 366)

Some of the major parts of the selection folder are now explained in more detail:

OPR. Your OPRs meet the board, not you. Therefore, these "descriptions of your performance" become very significant. Through these reports, the promotion board sees your potential or lack thereof. These evaluations are the only way that the board can evaluate your day-to-day performance which, by the way, is the most important function you can do for the Air Force. As stated in the USAF OFFICERS' NEWSLETTER, Oct 87, "The essence of career planning lies not so much in the selection of your next assignment as it does in the manner in which you carry out your present one. As far as you're concerned, the best professional development job is the one you have right now."

Officer Selection Brief. As stated previously, it's YOUR responsibility to ensure the correctness of your Officer Selection Brief (OSB).

Citations For U.S. Decorations. These should include all U.S. decorations only. Awards or foreign decorations aren't included.

Specialty Board Certification. Any specialty board certification letters or certificates for members of the Medical, Dental, Nurse and Medical Services Corps.

Letters to the Board From Eligible Officers. Officers eligible for consideration In/Above-the-Promotion Zone (IPZ-APZ) may send a letter to the president of the board calling attention to any matter of record concerning themselves that they believe important to their consideration. Correspondence other than letters (i.e., messages, telegrams) will not be accepted. The letter may not contain any attachments, criticize any officer, or reflect upon the character, conduct, or motives of any officer. Comments in the letter will be restricted to matters pertaining to consideration for promotion. Comments regarding regular appointment or selection to service schools are not authorized. Selection boards are not authorized to consider

correspondence from anyone else on behalf of any eligible officer. Any such correspondence will be returned to the sender. After the board adjourns, letters will be destroyed unless the officer provides a stamped, self-addressed envelope and requests that the letter be returned.

Letters Pertaining to Nonattendance or Ineligibility for Professional Military Education (PME) Schools. The bottom line is: If selected to attend PME in residence, go, unless there are extenuating circumstances beyond your control.

Active Duty Service Commitments

Active Duty Service Commitments (ADSCs) fulfill two very important functions. First, they communicate to Air Force members the periods of obligated service they must complete before becoming eligible to separate or retire from active duty. They subsequently assure the Air Force and the taxpayers receive an appropriate return for their investment in training/education, relocation, or promotion. Law establishes some ADSCs; policy establishes others. The complete list of ADSC incurring events and the associated commitments is found in AFI 36-2107 Active Duty Service Commitments (ADSC). Air Force members will be advised in writing of an ADSC incurring event, but lack of advance counseling does not negate an ADSC.

Role of the Assignment System

The purpose of the officer assignment system is to assign the right officer to the right position at the right time to meet AF mission requirements. Officers should not concern themselves with mapping out their career, but instead concentrate on their current duty, ensuring the proper level of depth-breadth development depending on grade. The only assignment with which an officer should be concerned is the one in which he or she is currently serving and, when available for a new assignment, the assignment that immediately follows. The officer's qualifications and professional development phase are the primary factors in making assignments.

Commander involvement is also a key element in this process. Nine months prior to becoming eligible for an assignment officers will receive a notice to inform them of their impending eligibility. This is a perfect time to seek counseling from your supervisor and commander. The new assignment system for officers requires that all officers complete an assignment preference worksheet. Once the officer has completed the worksheet it must then be forwarded to the commander for review and approval before being sent to Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC) for consideration for assignment. AFPC will return any assignment preference worksheet that has not been reviewed and approved by the officers commander.

Additional Self Development

As officers, it is our responsibility to continue to strive for excellence and self-development. We must enhance our understanding of the history of air and space power, Air Force doctrine, military strategy, and leadership. In learning the role of air

and space power as it applies to military operations, we'll break down the "stovepipes" in our service that hamper our full realization of its potential and significance.

To help facilitate this learning and understanding, former Air Force Chief of Staff, General (Ret) Ronald Fogleman, created a professional reading list based on inputs from Air University, the Air Force Academy, Air Force History Office, and a few other agencies and historians. The list is divided into three levels: a basic list for captains, an intermediate list for majors and lieutenant colonels, and an advanced list for colonels and generals. The list for captains is as follows:

Winged Shield, Winged Sword by Natly
10 Propositions Regarding Air Power by Phillip Meilinger
Heart of the Storm by Richard Reynolds
Lincoln on Leadership by Donald Phillips
The Right Stuff by Tom Wolfe
Hostile Skies by James Hudson
A Few Great Captains by DeWitt Copp
Winged Victory by Geoffrey Perret
Officers in Flight Suits by John Sherwood
This Kind of War by T.R. Fehrenbach
Thud Ridge by Jack Broughton

Throughout your years as a junior officer, take the time to read these books as part of your personal and professional self-development.

Mentoring

A mentor is defined as a "trusted counselor or guide." Mentoring, therefore, is a relationship in which a person with greater experience and wisdom guides another person to develop both personally and professionally. Mentoring is a professional development program designed to help each individual reach his or her maximum potential. Mentoring is a professional relationship because it fosters free communication by subordinates with superiors concerning their careers, performance, duties and missions. It enhances morale and discipline and improves the operational environment while maintaining respect for authority.

Air Force mentoring covers a wide range of areas, such as career guidance, technical and professional development, leadership, Air Force history and heritage, air and space power doctrine, strategic vision, and contribution to joint warfighting. It also includes knowledge of the ethics of our military profession and understanding of the Air Force's core values of integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do. Commanders and supervisors will encourage subordinates to read and comprehend warfighting publication and the books in the CSAF Professional Reading Program. This list follows on the next page.

Mentoring is a fundamental responsibility of all Air Force officers and civilian employees supervising officers. They must know their people, accept personal responsibility for them, and be accountable for their professional development. Mentors help the mentoree to distinguish between individual goals, career

aspirations, and realistic expectation. First and foremost, officers must stay focused on developing people who are skilled in the employment and support of air and space power and how it meets the security needs of the nation.

To help the subordinate focus on professional development there are many organizations, programs, and associations dedicated to the advancement and education of military professionals. Some of these are listed in the mentoring tool box diagram.

Usually the immediate supervisor or rater is designated as the primary mentor for each of his or her subordinates. However, this does not limit the subordinate from seeking additional counseling or advice from other sources or mentors. The mentor is responsible for ensuring the officer doesn't view a successful career solely in terms of promotion success. Look for and seek out mentors to help your professional development as an officer and realize that you will one day find yourself in the role of the mentor.

THE MENTORING TOOLBOX

Company Grade Officer Council (CGOC). This organization is active in helping the base and local community. It is normally active at each base.

Air Force Intern Program (AFIP). HQ USAF/DPPE, 1040 Pentagon, Washington, DC 20330-1040. Gives future leaders early Pentagon experience.

Lieutenant's Professional Development Program (LPDP). This program fills the professional development gap between commissioning and Squadron Officer School along with the Air and Space Basic Course.

The Order of the Daedalians and the Airlift/Tanker Association. Professional associations of military pilots.

The Air Force Association (AFA), 1501 Lee Highway, Arlington, VA 22209. Founded in 1946 to support air power and a strong national defense. Lobbies on all Air Force-related issues.

The Association of Military Surgeons of the US, 9320 Old Georgetown Rd., Bethesda, MD 20814. Founded in 1891 to represent physicians and other health care workers of commissioned rank. Mainly a professional development group.

Military Chaplains Association of the USA, P.O. Box 42660, Washington DC 20015. Founded in 1925 for Army chaplains. Chartered by Congress in 1950 to represent the interests of all military chaplains. Lobbies Congress on pay, benefits, and preservation of the chaplain corps.

The National Association of Uniformed Services (NAUS), 5535 Hempstead Way, Springfield, VA 22151. Founded in 1968 to represent anyone who wears (or has worn) a uniform. Lobbies for an array of pay and benefits.

The Retired Officers Associations (TROA), 201 N. Washington St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Founded in 1919 to represent retired officers. Focuses on pay and benefit issues.

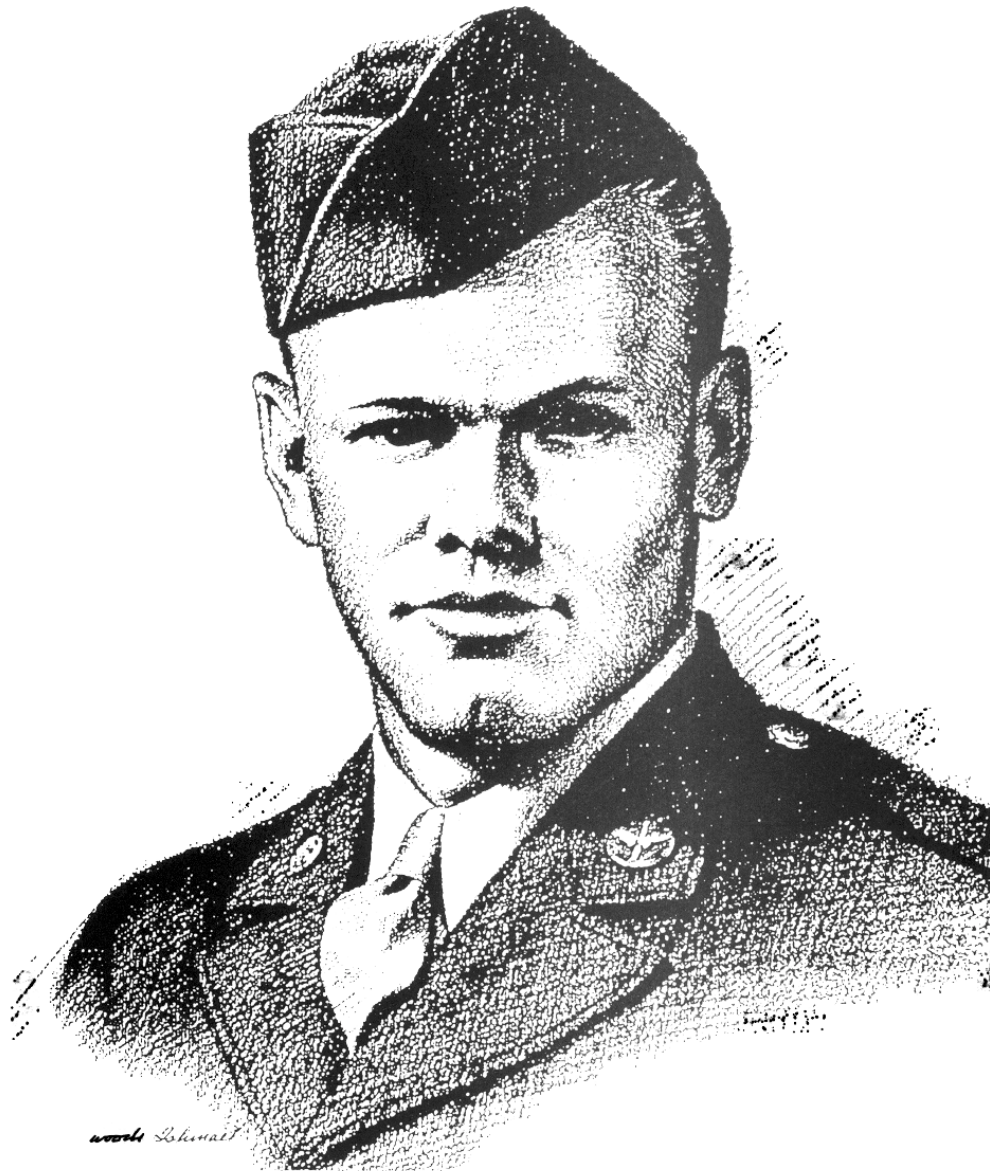
Air Force Cadet/Officer Mentor Action Program, Inc. (AFCOMAP), P.O. Box 47015, Washington, DC 20050. A private organization founded in 1982. Chartered by SAF and CSAF. Committed to supporting the Air Force in the recruitment, professional development, and retention of cadets and junior officers. Originally founded for minority officers, but open to all.

Air University Library, 600 Chennault Circle, Maxwell AFB AL 36112-6424. Houses well-balanced collections especially strong in the fields of war fighting, aeronautics, Air Force and DoD operations, military sciences, education, leadership, and management.

Civil Air Patrol (CAP), 105 South Hansell St., Bldg 714, Maxwell AFB AL 36112-6332. The volunteer civilian auxiliary of the Air Force. CAP performs emergency service missions to include air and ground search and rescue, disaster relief, and drug interdiction. It promotes citizenship, leadership, physical fitness, and aerospace education through its cadet programs.

Bibliography:

1. AFPAM 36-2611, Officer Professional Development Guide, Washington DC: Department of the Air Force, 1 Apr 96.
2. AFPAM 36-2506, You and Your Promotions-The Air Force Officer Promotion Program, Washington DC: Department of the Air Force, 1 Sep 97.
3. AFI 36-3401, Air Force Mentoring, 1 Jul 97.



STAFF SERGEANT HENRY EUGENE ERWIN

was radio operator of a B-29 leading a group to attack Koriyama, Japan, 12 April 1945. He was also charged with dropping phosphorescent smoke bombs to aid in assembling the group on the bomb run. A faulty bomb exploded, striking him in the face, obliterating his nose and completely blinding him. Smoke filled the plane, totally obscuring the pilot's vision. Ignoring personal safety and indescribable pain, he picked up the white-hot bomb, crawled to a window, threw the bomb out and then collapsed, completely aflame. The smoke cleared and the pilot pulled the plane out of its dive, only 300 feet from the ground. Sergeant Erwin had saved the lives of all of his comrades.